

A method to the March Madness

Parker Robb | Collegian
ABOVE: K-State senior forward Rodney McGruder dribbles the ball down the court during a game against West Virginia on Feb. 18. K-State shot 50 percent from the field against the Mountaineers in Bob Huggins' first return to Bramlage Coliseum since he left K-State in 2007.



RIGHT: The Wildcats' bench erupts after a teammate scores a basket behind the arc against West Virginia on Feb. 18. K-State shot 50 percent from the field against the Mountaineers in Bob Huggins' first return to Bramlage Coliseum since he left K-State in 2007.

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TTECH | K-State looks to win first title since '77

Continued from page T3

four points in his last game, Tolbert has scored 10 points in the previous two games. For the Wildcats, this game is just another step in making history. K-State has not won a conference title since 1976-77 when it was still the Big Eight conference. K-State's highest finish in the Big 12 conference came in 2010 when the Wildcats finished tied for second.

points and nine rebounds per game in his last three games. It was sophomore forward Jordan Tolbert who was able to find some success against the Wildcats in the last meeting, as he finished with 19 points and five rebounds against the Wildcats in Lubbock. Despite only scoring

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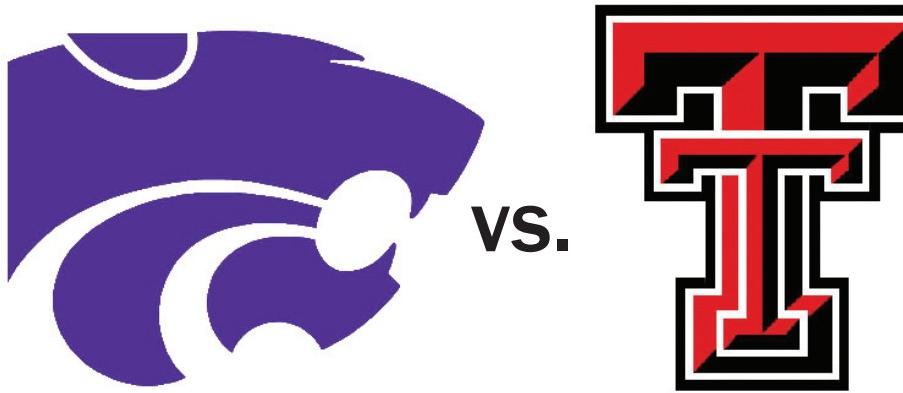
VOL. 118 NO. 100



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TIPOFF

6 p.m. @ Bramlage Coliseum

K-State legitimate contender for NCAA tournament run



Parker Robb | Collegian
Junior guard Will Spaulding defends a West Virginia attacker during the Wildcats' game against the Mountaineers on Feb. 18 at Bramlage Coliseum. The Wildcats' defense has been key to this season's success.



Mark Kern

Jackson to have one of his worst games of the season. Going into that game, Jackson led the Big 12 in points and assists, averaging 19 and six respectively. While he finished the game with nine assists, he had only 2 of 9 from the field and turned the ball over five times.

The key to every defense is not allowing the offense to get the ball into the post. With Rodriguez applying pressure on the ball, the Wildcats have a defense that can win a tough game in March if the offense is having an off day.

However, this season, no one team has separated itself from the rest, giving K-State as good a chance as anyone to make a run to the Final Four.

Here are the three keys for K-State to make a run deep in March.

1. Defense:

The Wildcats are tied for first in the Big 12 Conference with KU, giving up only 59.9 points per game on the season. The key has been the Wildcats' ability to play great ball defense.

Sophomore point guard Andre Rodriguez is responsible for slowing down the other team's point guard. In a matchup on Feb. 16 against the top point guard in the Big 12, Rodriguez forced Baylor senior Pierre

March Madness.

3. Go-to players:

In the tournament, many games go down to the final seconds, so a lot of the time they come down to one basket. A team needs that guy that they can count on to get the basket for them, and luckily K-State has that proven scorer in senior forward Rodney McGruder.

McGruder is the leading scorer for the Wildcats with 15 points while also contributing 5.3 rebounds and two assists per game. He has also shown that when the game is on the line, he is more than capable of putting a team on his back and carrying them to the top.

In the Big 12 opener against the Oklahoma State Cowboys on Jan. 5, the Wildcats were trailing by two points at the half, and McGruder had been held to only two points. All he did in the second half was score 26 points, as K-State responded to come back and win the game 73-67—a win that has become important in terms of Big 12 standings.

With so many variables from the one-and-done to more parity across the rest of the nation, this March promises to be a special one for basketball fans, and potentially for K-State fans as well.

Mark Kern is a senior in print journalism. Please send comments to sports@kstatecollegian.com.

By the numbers



Parker Robb | Collegian
K-State sophomore guard Angel Rodriguez shoots one of the Wildcats' many threes during the Feb. 18 game against Bob Huggins' West Virginia Mountaineers at Bramlage Coliseum. The Wildcats beat the Mountaineers 71-61 in a game that included 49 personal fouls and 55 free throws.

Nicolas Wahl
staff writer

1 The number of wins K-State head coach Bruce Weber needs to tie the all-time wins mark by a first-year Wildcat head coach.

With a win over the Red Raiders, the Wildcats would move to 23-5 on the season. The 23 wins would tie a record set by Bob Huggins in 2006-07. It should be noted that Huggins won his final two games in the post-season, while Weber has the Wildcats positioned to notch a higher number of wins with four regular season games remaining.

4.2 K-State's average advantage in turnover percentage in conference games.

The Wildcats are the best in the Big 12 at gaining an advantage in the turnover game. They force opponents into turnovers on nearly 22 percent of their possessions while coughing up the ball on just 17.6 percent of their own. Texas Tech is on

the other end of the spectrum. The Red Raiders are last in the conference as they turn it over nearly 22 percent of the time, while only causing turnovers on 18.9 percent of opponents' possessions.

11 The most conference wins by a K-State team since the Big 12's inception in 1996.

The 2009-10 team that earned a No. 2 seed in the NCAA tournament and amassed an 11-5 Big 12 record set the standard for Wildcat success in conference play. This season's squad would move to 12-3 in Big 12 play with a win over the Red Raiders. With the league schedule now totaling 18 games the Wildcats would need to finish with a 13-5 mark to reach their best conference record by winning percentage.

40 The Wildcats' shooting percentage from 3-point range during Big 12 play this season.

No one in the conference has knocked in 3-pointers as routinely as the Wildcats. K-State, as a team, is 110-of-275 from

3-point range. The Wildcats lead the conference – among players who make an average of 1.5 per game – hitting 29-of-63 for 46 percent. Senior guard Rodney McGruder and junior guard Will Spradling are also in the top 10, both hitting over 40 percent as well. Senior guard Martavious Irving leads the team, hitting 14-of-29, but hasn't shot enough to be considered for the Big 12 leaderboard.

47.5 The field goal percentage that Texas Tech has allowed Big 12 opponents to shoot this season.

The Red Raiders are worst in the Big 12 at both overall field goal percentage defense and 3-point percentage defense. They allow Big 12 opponents to hit 39.8 percent of all 3-point attempts, a mark that would rank second in the conference for offensive 3-point percentage. Coupled with Texas Tech's own lack of shooting prowess, just 38.5 percent in conference play, it isn't a combination that should give anyone wearing red much confidence heading into tonight's contest in the Little Apple.

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Wildcats look for season sweep against 9th-place Texas Tech



Texas Tech sophomore forward Jordan Tolbert rebounds the ball over senior guard guard Rodney McGruder during the Red Raiders' 68-59 loss to K-State on Feb. 5 in the United Spirit Arena in Lubbock.

John Zetmeir
staff writer

With four games left on the schedule, the K-State Wildcats (22-5, 11-3 Big 12 Conference) still hold a share of the top spot in the conference, and if they win out will at least have a share of the Big 12 Championship.

"We're trying to win a championship, you know?" said sophomore guard Angel Rodriguez, following the Texas game on Saturday. "We've got to play at a high level. We've still got a couple of games. If we keep doing what we do, we should be all right."

For the third consecutive Monday night, K-State will take the floor, this time to take on the Texas Tech Red Raiders (9-16, 2-12 Big 12). The Raiders enter the game in second to last in the conference with their only road win coming against TCU, who is currently in last place.

These are two teams that are very familiar, facing off only 20 days ago. In the first matchup it was all K-State as they cruised to a 68-59 victory in Lubbock.

It was a game that was decided on the glass, as the Wildcats out-rebounded the Raiders 35-19. K-State was also able to grab 15 offensive rebounds compared to Texas Tech's six.

For Texas Tech, there have been few bright spots this season, and an upset win over K-State on the road would add to the list. Of the Raiders 12 conference losses, 10 have come by double digits. The matchup against the Wildcats was not one of those double-digit losses, but K-State has been a different team at home.

The Wildcats enter the game with only one loss in Bramlage Coliseum this season, while Texas Tech has only one road Big 12 win. K-State has won their last four home games by an average of over 16 points per game.

Coming off of another 20-point performance, K-State senior guard Rodney McGruder has reasserted himself as the Wildcats go-to guy. In his last game against Texas Tech, McGruder finished with a team-high 18 points and nine rebounds.

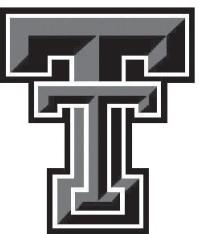
Texas Tech has a reliable scoring threat as well in junior forward Jaye Crockett.

On the season, Crockett is averaging 12.3 points per game while shooting nearly 52 percent from the field. As well as being the team's leading scorer, Crockett is also leading the team with 7.2 rebounds per game. In the first meeting this season, the Wildcats were able to hold Crockett to only four points and three rebounds. However, Crockett enters Monday night's matchup averaging over 15

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Matching Up

K-State vs. Texas Tech



Adam Suderman
staff writer

Backcourt:

The development of K-State's backcourt has been a definite highlight of the team's season thus far. Perhaps no player has shown more improvement than point guard Angel Rodriguez. The sophomore has been blistering of late, averaging 17.2 points and 6.4 assists over the last five games.

Rodriguez also ranks first in the conference in assist-to-turnover ratio. Along with junior guards Shane Southwell and Will Spradling, the backcourt has become one of the conference's finest units, and it couldn't be developing at a better time.

Offensive rebounding is once again one of K-State's best statistics as the Wildcats sit atop the conference, averaging 13.52 offensive boards per game. K-State has dominated some of the conference's best competition of late and should be more than prepared to face

the Red Raiders' front court.

Freshman guard Josh Gray helps solidify the unit for the Red Raiders, averaging 10 points per game. Gray's performance along with fellow freshman guard Dusty Hannahs will largely dictate the final results.

ADVANTAGE: K-State

Frontcourt:

The Wildcat frontcourt has developed from its early season inconsistencies and has been a vital asset to K-State's late season improvements. Senior center Jeff Withey, junior center Dejan Kravic and sophomore center Jeff Withey in the conference's finest units, and it couldn't be developing at a better time.

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ADVANTAGE: K-State

Reserves:

Coming into this season, finding production off the bench was one of the biggest question marks for the Wildcats. Up to this point in the season, the unit has answered when head coach Bruce Weber has come calling.

Senior guard Martavious Irving is having arguably his best season as a Wildcat, averaging just over 18 minutes per game as well as shooting 42 percent from beyond the 3-point arc. Look down each

team's roster, and the Wildcats' depth shows itself both in numbers and competitive nature. With the Red Raiders' struggle with foul trouble, K-State will have the job after this season remains to be seen, but he's shown that he can keep the season afloat despite the difficulties.

ADVANTAGE: K-State

Couch:

Very few, if any, bad comments can be made about Bruce Weber in his first year as the Wildcats' head coach. Weber has helped guide the Wildcats to a 22-5 record and a first-place tie with their in-state rival, Kansas. With four games remaining in conference play, there is chatter of Weber as conference coach of the year and national coach of the year.

With his past postseason experience, Weber will be an excellent leader for the Wildcats as the month of March approaches. Interim head coach Chris Walker was faced with a tough challenge taking over the Red Raider program, and the

very difficult to imagine a Red Raider victory. Texas Tech is currently riding an eight-game losing streak and it is unlikely that the skid will end in Manhattan. Look for K-State's backcourt to again take control of the matchup and for the Wildcats to continue their pursuit of a conference championship.

PREDICTION:
K-State 78
Texas Tech 54

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